SAID ED

Hi

I have just returned from a quick visit to the church. The workers are bust about many parts of the project! Hardwood floor workers are placing the new parquet flooring under the pews, the mason and plumbers are aggressively attending to the Baptismal Font and the Ambo has been moved back slightly so as to allow for more visibility of the Altar.

It is all coming together rather well. Now, if we can just pay for it in a timely manner.

Have a great week!

Ed

By the time that you read this you have seen our new sanctuary platform and repositioned Altar and Ambo. Soon the handicap access ramp will be completed. The new pews and carpeting of our entire church will soon be in place. It won't be long before our new Baptismal Font will be functional as well. Our new Worship space is really taking shape. Don't you agree?

Last week I spoke about the importance of the Altar and asked the question: have you ever noticed the priest kiss the Altar at the beginning and end of Mass? This graceful act highlights the significance of the Altar as a central symbol in our worship life. The Altar represents Christ who presides at every Eucharistic celebration. The priest presider reverences the Altar with a kiss. This symbolic action is a sign of respect for the Lord and the Assembly who are the Body of Christ by reason of Baptism. So, in a sense one could say that the priests (and deacon, when he assists) kiss the Lord and the members of the community gathered to praise the Almighty.

Apart from the introduction of the use of the vernacular at Mass, the change in the location of the Altar away from the back wall of the church (remember our old church building) and into the midst of the Assembly?is probably the most obvious effect of the Second Vatican Council. This change allowed people to gather more easily around the Altar. This is another reason why our new Altar position (more in the midst of the Assembly) is important. The use of the vernacular and the repositioning of the Altar are two related changes. Both were also mandated by the Church at the Second Vatican Council.

In the pre-Vatican II liturgy, because the priest alone performed most of the liturgical functions, a long Altar was needed so that the two readings could be proclaimed from opposite ends of the Altar while remaining separate from the Eucharistic action, which took place in the center of the Altar. Such an elongated table is no longer necessary. Secondly, because communion should be given from the sacrifice just enacted on the Altar, the tabernacle was removed from the main Altar. This maintains the integrity of both Altar and tabernacle as sites of Christ's presence in the church. We have grown in our awareness of Christ's presence in the gathered Assembly, in the proclamation of the word, in the person of the priest and in the Eucharistic elements. We have been less attentive to the symbolic significance of the Altar itself.

The Rite of Dedication of an Altar (which most often takes place during the dedication of the church in which the Altar is located) gives us a glimpse of the significance of this symbol. In that rite, the Altar is sprinkled with water, anointed with chrism and incensed by the bishop in a pattern much like our initiation rituals. It is then clothed with an Altar cloth and adorned with lighted candles. These rituals leave no doubt that the Altar is "the midpoint between heaven and earth." With the ancient images of

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Abraham's Altar of sacrifice and the table of the Last Supper firmly rooted in our tradition, we encircle our parish Altar, confident that God is present in our midst.

Our beautiful Altar has added significance for me. It was made from the marble Altar that graced St. Bernard's Seminary chapel when I was a seminarian there in the 1960's. The Altar marble became available when St. Bernard's moved from its location on Lake Avenue in the city. This was about the same time as our present church was being built. It is such a blessing that the treasures of that church building have been incorporated in our sanctuary.

Have a good week!

*Ed*

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